

*Freedom of Information*

if in fact the result of the publication proved to be injurious to the public interest? We would be asking the courts to make what are essentially political judgments.

I should also like to quote from a letter which appeared in the *Globe and Mail* of June 7, 1978, from Mr. Westell who, I believe, was instrumental in writing the press gallery brief. The final two paragraphs of the letter read as follows:

I can understand why the Bar Association should wish to transfer jurisdiction from parliament to the courts, and I suspect that the lawyers have influenced their clients in big business and big labor. But I can't understand why Mr. Stevens—

That is another journalist.

—should believe that Canadian judges, most of whom seem to be highly conservative fellows, are likely to be more liberal than parliament in dealing with the release of information.

The decision on whether to release information may often involve a conflict between public interests: The so-called right to know and the proper protection of privacy and security. If judges are better equipped than elected politicians to make that sort of decision, why bother with parliament at all? Let the judges with their superior wisdom run the country.

I admit there are arguments on the other side of the question to the effect that the benefits of further reducing the doctrine of ministerial responsibility may be greater than the disadvantages of so doing. It is, however, not an artificial problem which confronts the government but a real problem which I hope and am convinced the joint committee will wrestle with. It is one of the reasons I await their report with great expectation.

● (1652)

I believe that all of us in this House have a conviction and determination to press forward in this matter and bring to parliament and pass through it effective legislation on freedom of information. That has been the purpose of our policy and was the underlying reason for the presentation of the green paper which was an honest exposition on our part, soliciting the debate which has taken place. I know that the joint committee has performed valuable work, and many of the witnesses before it presented valuable contributions to the debate. We now await the report of the joint committee, and I will remake today the commitment which the government has made often in the past, that we are determined to bring legislation on this matter before the House in the next session.

I will not today counsel this side of the House to accept this motion because I believe that it is unwise, particularly before we have seen the reasons and arguments brought forward by the joint committee. Let us not assume automatically that the most appropriate way of achieving the kind of independent review that we all wish to have is through a judicial review. Before I make up my mind on that question I certainly want to have the counsel that the joint committee will present to us.

It is on those grounds that I am reluctant to accept at this stage something that—with fuller experience and fuller knowledge which the committee provides—may not prove to be prudent, and I will oppose the resolution before the House. I would hope that no members of the House and certainly members of the public would not interpret that opposition to be any lessening of our determination to act in this area in the next session of the House.

[Mr. Roberts.]

**Mr. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure to be able to speak in support of the motion moved by my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark).

In a democracy no issue is more central to the survival of democracy itself than people in a country being able to have information they need to make informed judgments on issues of the day. I think James Madison, a former United States president, probably stated that principle much more articulately and profoundly than any member of this House could today. He described it in this way:

A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but the prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

Surely there is no issue which is more central to democracy itself than ensuring that the people of Canada have access to the information they need in order to make informed decisions about their government.

Over the course of the last several years government in Canada has grown in size and pervasiveness, so that today virtually no aspect of the average citizen's life is left untouched by government in one form or another. Just yesterday the *Toronto Star* ran a Gallup poll in which Canadians were asked to respond to questions about the extent of government involvement in their lives. When they were asked whether they felt the federal government affects their lives to a greater or lesser degree than it did ten years ago, 69 per cent of Canadians said that they felt that the involvement of the federal government in their lives was greater today than it was ten years ago. When they were asked the question "Do you think the level of influence of the federal government today in the way of life of the average Canadian is too great, too little or just about right" 51 per cent of the Canadians polled indicated that they felt the level of involvement of governments in their day to day lives is too high.

The very size of government itself and the complexity of decisions which have to be made by government today make it that much more difficult for citizens of this country to discharge their responsibilities, to appraise judiciously the activities of their government, and to be able to make sound judgments about the political issues of the day. As the power of big government grows and as its pervasiveness grows, as its involvement in the day to day lives of Canadians grows, the stature of the government increases, but the stature of the average citizen, his power to affect his day to day life, diminishes.

Governments today have a tremendous advantage over everyday citizens and over parliament in trying to state their point of view. If one takes a look at the difference in resources which are available to government today, there are several. First, the government has virtually unlimited resources in terms of spending to promote its particular point of view. In 1978 the government spends hundreds of millions of dollars to put across particular points of view on issues which it supports. It has large staff resources at its disposal which are able to do